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HERITAGE TRAIL

“A Shepherd’s Life in the Cypriot Mountains”

Introduction

Cyprus is still an important place to hear about ancient shepherds and meet some modern-day ones. It’s even possible that some of the earliest ‘farm animals’ were domesticated mouflon, 8,000 years ago, here in this multi-faceted island. Most Cypriots eat sheep/ goat cheese and yogurt, pretty much every day. Less than 100 years ago, there were about 40 shepherds in Kato Drys, now very few.

Come to Cyprus to briefly live the life of a shepherd, hearing stirring tales, maybe milking a goat, walking through the aromatic ‘maquis’ landscape and almost certainly eating the famous cheeses, ‘halloumi’ and ‘ánari’, after first witnessing them being made. We even give you the chance to explore ‘Shepherd Inspired Fashion’.

This ‘Shepherd’s Heritage Trail’ in Larnaca district’s mountainous region, is offered by Kato Drys Community Council and their stakeholders, Mola Culture Factory. Find the link to the map of the trail below, or contact the Mola Culture Factory for more details.

What you’ll discover

- **Kato Drys Village** – At stop one, you will hear the tale of the “Foxes of Kato Drys” sat in the local coffee shop in the beautiful village of Kato Drys. Traditional skills students working with woodcarvers made a beautiful sculpture of a running fox with its tail on fire; it hangs by the coffee shop. Have a coffee (we suggest ‘Cyprus coffee’) and hear the tale, which involves painting the church with yogurt!
- **St Spyridon’s Chapel** – Then, you will go in a 7-seater 4WD vehicle, down a farm road to St Spyridon’s chapel and hear the story of this much revered saint, a modest man who herded his animals and wore a simple shepherd’s hat.
- **Panayia Milianiotissa Chapel** – Continuing in the 4WD vehicle, you will visit another chapel, Panayia Milianiotissa, this one is ruined and has been subject to an interesting archaeological excavation under instruction from the Priest. The shepherd’s village Milianiotissa close to the church was abandoned long ago. It is one of the ‘lost villages’. It’s a good place to discuss the decline of traditional shepherding.
- **Loulla’s Farm** - On the farm track from Kato Drys to Choirokoitia, we will be looking out for interesting and useful wild plants. Of course, what you see depends on the season but there’s always something to discover.

1. Locally called **“Spalathkia”** (in Latin *“Calicotome villosa”*), a tough spiky bush with resin that makes it insect proof. It was used as a base in the ceiling/ flat roof, for the clay to stick to.
2. Locally called **“Throubi”** (in Latin *“Thymus capitatus”*), Wild Mediterranean Thyme which was used to treat several diseases and as a flavoring in cooking. The leaves of “Throubi” are used in various foods to add aroma but also because of their antitoxic properties. Also used in roof spaces to deter insects. In Ancient Greece soldiers bathed in a bath with thyme for anointing and protection.
3. Locally called **“Esteva”** (in Latin *“Cistus ladanifer”*) is an aromatic shrub with white or pink rose-like blooms, occasionally lilac coloured. A tea from it reduces high blood pressure and it is used for women’s ailments, such as heavy periods and to treat cystitis (it gives the disease its name).
4. Locally called **“Dakria tis Panagias”** (Tears of Mother Mary) or “Immortelle”, *Helichrysum italicum* tea detoxifies liver, relieves spasms, stimulates to the gallbladder and is a diuretic. It helps with digestion and relieves gallbladder pain. It is an antispasmodic and is effectively used for smooth muscle relaxation, works as an antiseptic solution and is traditionally used to treat conditions related with the respiratory tract.



Heritage stories

Story 1 “Kato Drys Village”



Many years ago, Kato Drys, a small village in the Cypriot mountains, was a simple place! Mainly shepherds lived there. They were devout Orthodox Christians. They looked across the valley at the next village's beautiful white church (probably 'Vavla') and were envious. They had a meeting and the neighbouring church was mentioned. One shepherd said “we have lots of yogurt. Perhaps we could use it to paint our church?”. They all agreed and next day they

made a start. Soon it was finished and it was a beautiful white colour. They went up to the aloni (a high flat hill where the grain is threshed) behind the village and were very pleased, slapping each other on the back triumphantly! ...then... a fox crept out of the bushes and began to lick the church! They were mortified, this was like a sacrilegious act and certain to offend God. They ran down the hill to scare the fox away, but the unfortunate creature instead ran into the church and there, its tail caught fire from a candle. Eventually it ran outside with the villagers chasing it. Its tail was still on fire. The surrounding fields were full of almost ripe wheat. It was close to harvest time. Everywhere the fox went, its tail set the grain on fire! The villagers were now convinced that God was angry and fervently prayed “please God, take what you must, but we beg you, leave us something to eat”. Abruptly a small black cloud appeared and rain fell. Just enough to put out the fires in the fields. The village's winter food supply was secured. NOW, the tale is a moral one. Do not be envious and jealous! And do not use yogurt to paint a church. This latter lesson is not quite right! Dairy products can be useful in traditional painting! Since this incident residents of Kato Drys are called ‘the foxes’.

Kato Drys village the first stop on the Shepherds Heritage Trail. Your next stops are St Spyridon's Chapel, Panayia Milianiotissa Chapel, and Loulla's Farm. Find the link to the map of the trail in the description to this video below, or contact the Mola Culture Factory for more details.

Story 2 “St Spyridon’s Chapel”



Saint Spyridon, (AD. 270 – 348), was born in Assia, in Cyprus. He worked as a simple shepherd and was known for his great piety. He married and had one daughter, Irene. Upon the death of his wife, Spyridon entered a monastery, and their daughter entered a convent.

The life of Spyridon included some hardships. He eventually became Bishop of Trimythous, or Tremithous (today called

Tremetousia), in Larnaca District. He took part in the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (AD 325), where he was involved in theological arguments. He converted a pagan philosopher to Christianity by using a potsherd to illustrate how one single entity (a piece of pottery) could be composed of three unique entities (fire, water and clay); a metaphor for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

A flaming potsherd is usually present in icons of the Saint (see this in the chapel). When Spyridon finished speaking, the shard is said to have miraculously burst into flame, water dripped on the ground, and only dust remained in his hand (other accounts of this event say that it was a brick he held in his hand). When he attended the Council, it is told that other Bishops tried to leave him behind and exclude him, because he was a simple man, poorly dressed and having a stammer. After the Council, Spyridon returned to his diocese in Tremithous. He had earlier fallen into disfavour during the persecutions of the emperor Maximinus, but died peacefully in old age.

After his death, in the 650s A.D., when the Arabs took Cyprus, Spyridon’s body was disinterred and taken to Constantinople. The relics were found to be incorrupt, and contained a sprig of basil, the ‘royal plant’, both of which were taken as a sign of divine confirmation of his sanctity.

When Constantinople fell to the Ottomans in 1453, Spyridon’s relics were removed again. This time, they were taken to the island of Corfu by a Corfiote monk called Kalohairetis (Καλοχαϊρέτης), where they remain to this day, in Saint Spyridon Church.

In modern literature there is an interesting account of the Durrell family getting involved in the annual (Palm Sunday) procession, when the Saint’s relics are paraded through the streets. Read “My Family and Other Animals” by Gerald Durrell. The relics are taken in procession every Palm Sunday and on other special occasions, for veneration by the faithful.

Spyridon is the patron saint of potters (from the miracle of the potsherd, above) and of the island of Corfu where he is called “Άγιος Σπυρίδων ο πολιούχος”, “Saint Spyridon, the Keeper of the City”, for the miracle of expelling the plague (πανούκλη) from the island. He is also the patron saint of Piraeus where he is celebrated and honoured every year on 12 December.

Spyridon is also believed to have saved the island at the second great siege of Corfu which took place in 1716. At that time the Turkish army and naval force led by Sultan Achmet III appeared in Butrinto opposite Corfu. His feast day is celebrated in the East on the Saturday before Great Lent (known as “Cheesefare Saturday”) and December 12. For those Eastern Churches that follow the traditional Julian Calendar, December 12 falls on December 25 of the modern Gregorian Calendar. In the West he is commemorated on December 14.

St Spyridon’s Chapel is the second stop on the Shepherds Heritage Trail. Your next stops are Panayia Milianiotissa Chapel and Loulla’s Farm. Find the link to the map of the trail in the description to this video below, or contact the Mola Culture Factory for more details.

Story 3 “Panayia Milianiotissa Chapel”



In 2022-2023, an archaeological team led by Grampus Heritage under instruction from the Priest of Kato Drys, investigated the chapel and carried out some archive research. The origin of the village name is thought to come from ‘miliá’, the Greek word for ‘apple tree’.

Growing apple trees in Cyprus is not usually possible below an altitude of 900 metres and this lost village is at 500 metres altitude (above sea level). Maybe in the Medieval period, the climate was wetter and cooler? The name might also have been chosen because of the symbolic Greek associations with apple trees? The Golden Apples in the Garden of Hesperides were a wedding gift to Hera from Gaia and were protected by a great serpent called Ladon.

The Apples as well as the rest of the life in the Garden were tended by the Hesperides, minor earth goddesses or nymphs and daughters of the Titan, Atlas. The Garden itself rested in an inaccessible spot near the edge of the world under the power of the Olympians. For his Eleventh Labour, Hercules was sent to the Garden to retrieve three Golden Apples for King Eurystheus. The exact location of the Garden and the Apples was unknown and Hercules had to pry the information from Nereus, the Old Man of the Sea.

Along the way, he also encountered and freed Prometheus who was told not to try pick the Golden Apples himself, but to ask Atlas. Hercules continued on with his journey, encountering several other figures, killing Ladon, and then he implored Atlas to pick the Apples for him. Eager to set aside his great burden of holding the heavens up, Atlas was easily convinced and Hercules took up the heavens in his place. Atlas then decided to take them to Eurystheus himself and leave Hercules there. Hercules tricked him by claiming he needed to make a pad for his shoulders to hold the heavens up more comfortably, asking Atlas to take them up again for only a moment. When Atlas held the heavens again, Hercules snatched the Apples and left. After the ordeal, Athena took the Apples from Eurystheus and returned them to the Garden, anticlimactically.

The Golden Apples of the Hesperides bear a striking resemblance to the Golden Apples present in Norse mythology. The apples in both cases are solid gold, beautiful to behold, and grant immortality. All this cannot be proven but the archaeological investigation seemed to show a switch from Orthodoxy to Catholicism because of re-alignment of the building plus the possible presence of a font. It is known that when Richard the Lionheart (a Catholic) conquered Cyprus in 1191 after falling out with Isaac Komnenos, a local governor and self-proclaimed emperor of the Byzantine Empire. Apparently, Isaac (historically called the Usurper) agreed to send 500 of his soldiers to the Holy Land and then reneged on his promise.

While in Limassol, Richard also married Berengaria, who was crowned queen. However, once back at his fortress of Famagusta, Isaac broke his oath of hospitality and began ordering Richard to leave the island. Richard then proceeded to conquer the island within days. This ushered in some persecution of the Orthodox church and conversion of some chapels and churches to Catholicism. Also, Orthodox clergy were banished to the mountains and many villages were abandoned and 'lost', maybe also Miliá and close-by Pano Drys, where a coin of Isaac the Usurper was found?

The Panayia Milianiotissa Chapel is the third stop on the Shepherds Heritage Trail. Your next stop is Loulla's Farm. Find the link to the map of the trail in the description to this video below, or contact the Mola Culture Factory for more details.

Story 4 “Loulla’s Farm”



Over the last 15 years we’ve taken literally hundreds of teachers and students to Loulla. She is a shepherdess and traditional cheese maker and a bastion of the local Orthodox church, which still follows the Julian calendar. At this stop visitors experience traditional cheese-making: witnessing the artisanal production of halloumi and anari cheeses.

The process was straightforward and with the addition of a pinch of mint and a vacuum pack, done. Outside there is a cheese safe containing maturing kefalotyri, another Cypriot delight, grated onto macaroni.

At Loulla’s the sitting room is ready with many tables and chairs; Loulla has a big family and she needs all this space for family gatherings. But of course, this is not the only reason. There are many people who come up here. Some tour operators send coaches with people who want to buy or want to see how halloumi is made. This means that Loulla keeps busy by demonstrating her business every now and then. She refers to a series on TV on the Mediterranean cuisine from Greece and tells me that recently these people paid her a visit and it was broadcasted. Some Cypriot magazines have several times published articles about her.

If the visit is in the weeks up to Easter, the farm produces the cheese for Flaounes pr. flah-OU-ness (singular flaouna), a traditional Cypriot Easter cheese filled bread. They are made with an aromatic yeasted phyllo dough, filled with a special Cypriot cheese, called Pafitiko, made during the Easter period especially for flaounes, flavoured with Masticha (mastic resin), mahlepi (mahlab) and mint.

If arrival at the farm is around 09.00, it is possible to help with the milking, cuddle some baby goats and sheep and pet some of the many farm dogs. All the farm animals are friendly; they are handled every day and also receive positive attention from the family.

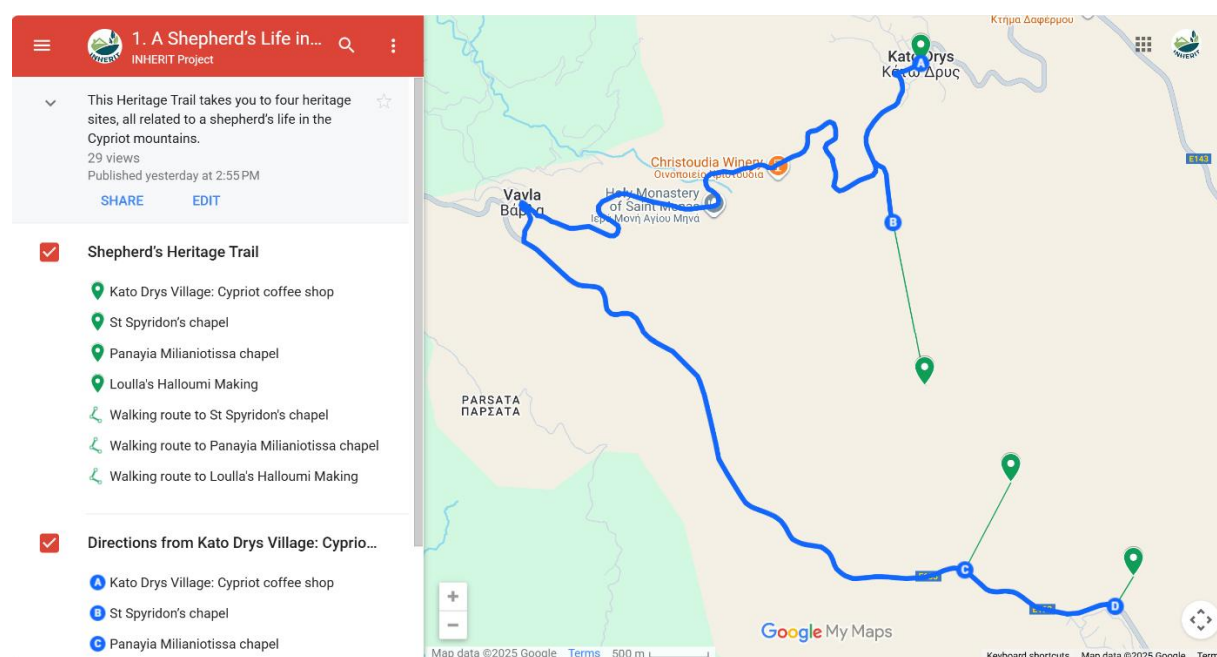
Why this trail matters

- The story and the experience will help to stimulate the local economy in a sustainable way.
- Visitors will learn more about the local cultural landscape that few tourists see.
- Discovery by tourists, from Cyprus and abroad, will raise awareness of the need for recognition and protection of vernacular patrimony.

The experience will help visitors recognise similarities between rural areas from all over the world and encourage a greater sense of oneness through social mediation.

Trail map

This Heritage Trail “A Shepherd’s Life in the Cypriot Mountains” takes you to four heritage sites, all related to a shepherd’s life in the Cypriot mountains



Link to the map:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/2/edit?mid=1T4qzBKNe8fnos6cfFx75XHY1-RRigVc&usp=sharing>

Starting point	Mola Culture Factory https://www.facebook.com/molalefkara/
Stop 1	Kato Drys Village: Cypriot coffee shop Google map link GPS: 34.85164, 33.30453

Stop 2	St Spyridon's chapel Google map link GPS: 34.82799, 33.30492
Stop 3	Panayia Milianiotissa chapel Google map link GPS: 34.820820, 33.312595
Stop 4	Loulla's Halloumi Making Google map link GPS: 34.81395, 33.32356

Trail details

- Length (km): about 14 km
- How it could be undertaken: driving; locals use their cars but the farm track is quite rough and care is needed. Use of a 4WD vehicle would be better (Mola Culture Factory can appoint a guide with such a vehicle). The farm track can be walked but you would need to re-trace your steps, as walking back along the national road is not advised.
- Special notes (clothes, equipment, weather, etc.): Between the end of October and the end of March, rain is possible and a light raincoat is needed plus a warmer jumper or fleece. At all times wear a hat, even in winter the sun can burn and in Spring, Summer and Autumn, sunburned is commonplace. You should also wear sun cream of over factor 40, especially if not between end of October and end of March. If walking you need strong shoes with good ankle protection. Do not walk into the 'maquis'; it is prickly and unyielding.
- Safety guidelines: Follow the rules about clothing and staying on the track. Cyprus has a few quite dangerous examples of wildlife but injuries are extremely rare. There is one very venomous snake, a blunt-nosed viper. Snakes lay in the sun to warm up, you spot them on the track; stamp your feet and they slither away. A black whipsnake is common and is not venomous. None of the 6 types of lizards that you might see, are any problem. Do not randomly turn over stones because there are venomous centipedes and scorpions but their bite is not worse than a bee sting. Do not walk off into the maquis, in case you come suddenly upon a snake. All in all, the wildlife is fascinating and if you take care, is not a threat.
- Guiding:

- This trail can be completed alone, or with a guide.
- To book a guide, please contact The Old Olive Mill – Mola Culture Factory
- Contacts for more details:
Mola Culture Factory
<https://www.facebook.com/molalefkara/>
Address: Saint Onoforus 1, Pano Lefkara, 7700, Larnaca District, Cyprus
Phone: +357 99739320
Email: martinclark6@aol.com

Quests / Chances to be creative

Quest 1 “Making St Spyridon’s Hat”

This is a one-day course, with breaks for lunch and tea/coffee. The venue is the Old Olive Mill (Mola Culture Factory). In all the icons of Spyridon he wears a traditional shepherd’s hat. The making of the hat is a variation of making a beehive / skep and a flat traditional Cypriot basket, a ‘tsestis’. Traditionally they were made in farming areas from long wheat straw but since the advent of combine harvesters that chop straw, there has been a switch to wild grasses and banana leaf.



The process involves laying the grass out and wrapping it to produce an even width ‘cable’, which is then coiled into a flat shape for a mat but indented for a hat. There are other names in Cyprus, a “sele” or “sofra”. The word “sofra” actually means the flat surface of a dinner table, and in the Mesaoria district, the locals still do eat their meals from this salver. Elsewhere in Cyprus, these hand-woven trays with striking geometric designs are considered such works of art that they don’t use them, but instead hang them on the wall as decoration!

Quest 2 “Shepherd-Inspired Fashion”

This idea came about in a strange way. In 2012, on a lonely road in Romania’s Trascau mountains, the founder of Mola came upon a shepherd. Although it was early summer and quite warm, he was wearing his traditional wool cloak and he had descended the mountain from quite high up. The founder learned French and Latin as a schoolboy, so Romanian was okay for him! He asked to take a photograph and the shepherd obliged. The



picture was posted on Facebook and the famous UK fashion designer, Vivienne Westwood saw it; she asked her stylist, Stevie Westgarth, to make contact. All over the Balkans, such coats are in everyday use, even today. Shepherds, often nomadic, were becoming a focus for some fashion designers, and the ‘Shepherd-look’ or ‘Nomad-look’ was taking off. For the founder, that look has some defining features...

1. Clothes in natural colours – perhaps dyed with plant, mineral or even animal pigments.
2. Layering, so the shepherd can take off layers as the cold night transforms into hot noonday sun.
3. Loose fitting to allow movement.
4. Use of leather, sheepskin, and wool + other natural fibres (cordage from grasses and tree bark for example).
5. Simple adornment including fringes, tassels and chunky jewellery from found objects.
6. Freedom, confidence and good health. Undoubtedly, shepherds are ‘long-lived’!
7. A sense of romance, adventure and poetry – shepherds became famous authors, poets and pioneers.
8. Being in control of your own time and destiny.
9. Rooted in culture and nature, in-tune with the cultural landscape.
10. Not a slave to time but going with an easier pace of life and a more natural lifestyle with healthy eating, etc.
11. The wearing of masks by shepherds to guard against insects – we glamorized this aspect a bit!

Since the first correspondence, meeting with and working with Stevie Westgarth, the Mola team have done photoshoots and events in Romania, Slovakia, Cyprus and Turkey.



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As part of this Shepherd's trail, the fashion is an optional element and adds a day and a night to the experience. Mola keeps a wardrobe of shepherd inspired clothes and often use Loulla's farm or the abandoned shepherd's village of Drapkea close to Kato Drys. For photoshoots.

Disclaimer:

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